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Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 1943

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Subject: "HOW TO FIGHT MILDEW." Information from home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

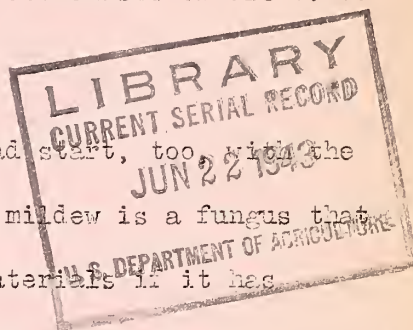
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The mildew season has arrived...and is off to a head start, too, with the help of seasonal rains, humidity and floods. You know, mildew is a fungus that grows on fabrics, leather, wood, paper and many other materials if it has moisture, warmth and darkness to encourage it. As it grows it leaves ugly stains and a musty odor...often rots and weakens fabrics...decays wood...damages whatever it grows on.

So now is the time to take measures for preventing mildew around the house and also to be ready with first aid treatments whenever mildew appears.

To begin with, you should know that air and light...ventilation and sunning around the house can help a great deal in keeping mildew away. It is in the dark, close, damp, warm, often forgotten places around the house that mildew strikes first...and worse. Down cellar...in clothing closets...on shower curtains... in damp clothes rolled up for ironing...in the far corners of bureau drawers...mildew is likely to grow in warm weather.

So the first rule for preventing mildew is to keep the house as dry and well-aired as possible. Heat from an electric lamp kept burning in a clothes closet will often keep the air dry enough to prevent mold on clothes. Frequent airing with an electric fan is another help. Another way of keeping the closet dry is to have an open jar of calcium chloride standing in the closet. The calcium chloride absorbs moisture from the air and turns to liquid. Then you have to throw it out and replace it with new solid chloride. Otherwise this is an easy way to keep the atmosphere dry. In damp basements crocks or jars half filled



with lumps of unslaked lime will absorb moisture and help in the campaign against mildew.

Mildew attacks soiled fabric more readily than clean fabric. So one of the ways of keeping it down is to keep things clean. Shower curtains of duck or canvas are very susceptible to mildew attack. Wash them frequently with soap and water to help against mildew. And spread them out to dry every time after they have become wet. It is the curtains left bunched together after a bath, or left sticking to the wall that suffer most from mildew.

As a further preventive measure home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have worked out a mildew-resistant finish for canvas or duck shower curtains which anyone can put on at home. For this, you will need crystals of cadmium chloride which you buy at drug stores. The crystals are poisonous if taken internally so keep them out of reach of children and pets.

Here is how you use those crystals to mildew-proof your shower curtain. First soak the curtains 20 minutes in enough hot soapy water to cover them. Make a solution of cadmium chloride in hot water using 3 ounces of cadmium chloride crystals for each gallon of water. Squeeze the shower curtain out of the soapsuds and put it directly into the hot solution of cadmium chloride. Keep it hot for half an hour. Be sure the solution covers the curtain well. Do not rinse. Simply wring out the curtain and dry on a rope clothes line...never a metal line. Curtains treated this way will withstand weather and washing and still resist mildew attack.

These are some of the ways to prevent mildew. Now about the first aid methods to use when mildew starts. To begin with, go after the mildew while it is new and fresh...before the growth has had a chance to work down and attack the fibers. Washing with soap and water and then sunning will usually take out fresh stains. If not, try covering them with lemon juice and salt and placing the garment in the sun.

Old and stubborn mildew stains are difficult and sometimes impossible to remove without damaging the material. Don't risk a bleach on colored fabrics but on white fabrics you can bleach with sodium perborate. Sodium perborate is often used as a mouthwash. It is the safest bleach for all types of material...so safe that you can leave a garment soaking half an hour in soapsuds containing sodium perborate. Use 4 tablespoons of perborate for each pint of soapy water. Rinse the material thoroughly as a final step.

For white cottons, linens and rayons you can use Javelle water, a chlorine bleach. Place the stained fabric over a bowl and apply the bleach to the mildewed spot with a medicine dropper. Let the bleach remain on the fabric only one minute--no longer. Finally rinse the fabric thoroughly in clear lukewarm water. Never use Javelle water on wool or silk because it rots these fabrics.

One point now about mildew on shoes. When mildew appears on shoes, wash it off with a thick suds of mild pure soap or saddle soap, and wipe with a damp cloth. Dry shoes thoroughly and then rub the leather with floor wax to keep off dampness and further mildew.

